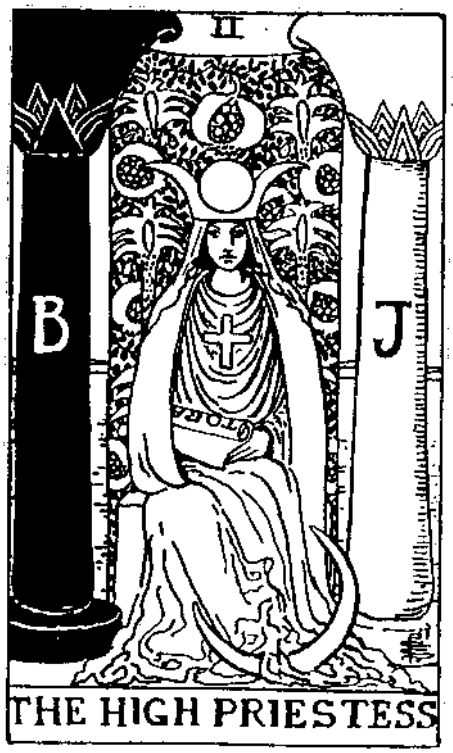
Syllabus for
University Course 83

Women, Magic and Power
1800-1960



Prof. Robert Mathiesen

Spring, 2004/5

University Course 83 Robert Mathiesen
MWF, 12:00-12:50 am Salomon Center, room 203

Women, Magic and Power, 1800-1960

Fall, 2004/5

Description of the Course

This course examines the lives of about two dozen prominent women in the U.S. and the U.K., all of whom were linked in a network of personal acquaintance, who sought to gain power and to bring about political and social reforms through magic or radically unconventional religion. Among them were mesmerists, spiritualists, religious teachers, physicians, sex reformers, politicians, occultists, actors, and poets. Particular emphasis will be placed on the connections between their occult and spiritual practices and their political and social activism in the context of the women's rights movement and shifts in ideas about femininity in the U.S. and the U.K.

Disclaimer

Some of the women and men studied in this course wrote about human sexual activity, and at times even examined specific techniques of sexual intercourse with very close attention to the anatomical, physiological and psychological details. Also, some kinds of sexual activity which some of them discussed or recommended (or even practiced) may currently be regarded as immoral, perverted, exploitative or abusive, or may be illegal. Likewise, some of the political positions that they took may currently be regarded as reprehensible, subversive, or may even be illegal to advocate. Moreover, a few of their writings have been condemned by one or another court of law under statutes pertaining to obcenity, blasphemy or anarchy, and their authors have been imprisoned (or, in one case, judicially murdered) for publishing them. Even today some of their views and writings have not lost their power to shock or offend many people.

Nevertheless, any course on these women must examine some of this problematic material. Please understand that I do not wish to shock or offend you, but that I am unable to avoid the *risk* of shock or offense if I am to give these women and men the academic consideration that they deserve.

Before you decide to enroll in this course, therefore, I request that you consider whether you may be offended, intimidated, embarrassed or otherwise adversely or unacceptably affected by such texts and ideas, and also by dispassionate, non-judgemental academic discussion of them in the mixed company of the classroom. I also ask you to let me know immediately whenever you find that any particular text, idea or discussion has affected you in any such way, so that I can attempt to reduce the possibility for offense in the future. I also am glad to excuse any of you from any particular class or seminar whenever you feel that the assigned text or topic may affect you too strongly in any such way.

Your decision to remain enrolled in this course signifies that you know that some of the texts and topics of this course will be problematic in the ways specified, and that you promise to accept any risk which this fact may entail to you.

Calendar for the Course

			M	W	F				M	W	F	
Week	**1**	=	—	26	28*	Jan.	**9**	=	21†	23	25§	
	2	=	31†	2	4	Feb.			[Spring Recess]			
	3	=	7†	9	11§		**10**	=	4†	6	8§	Apr.
	4	=	14*	16	18§		**11**	=	11	13	15§	
	5	=	--	23†	25§		**12**	=	18†	20	22§	
	6	=	28	2	4§	Mar.	**13**	=	25*	27	29§	
	7	=	7†	9	11		**14**	=	2†	4*	6§	May
	8	=	14*	16	18§		**15**	=	9*	--	—-	

**** A written assignment is due by 5:00 pm on this day.***
† A reading assignment is due before class on this day.
§ This Friday's class is a Seminar.
This course will meet during Reading Period.

Office hours will be held on Fridays, 2:00-4:00 pm, or by individual appointment at other times, in room 022 in the basement of Marston Hall (863-3597).

Reading Assignments

You will have two kinds of reading assignments in this course.

1. Required Books. These books are to be read by the first class in the specified week. There are the seven required books available for purchase in the bookstore, and an eighth which will be made available as an author's reprint in class. (For their dates and publishers see the bibliography at the end of this syllabus.)

Week 2 (by 1/31): Ann **Braude's** *Radical Spirits*.

Week 3 (by 2/7): Robert **Mathiesen's** *The Unseen Worlds of Emma Harding Britten*.

Week 5 (by 2/23): Joscelyn **Godwin's** *The Theosophical Enlightenment*.

Week 7 (by 3/7): Mary K. **Greer's** *Women of the Golden Dawn*.

Week 9 (by 3/21): Gillian **Gill's** *Mary Baker Eddy*..

Week 10 (by 4/4): Beryl **Satter's** *Each Mind a Kingdom*.

Week 12 (by 4/18): Barbara **Goldsmith's** *Other Powers*.

Week 14 (by 5/2): Ronald **Hutton's** *The Triumph of the Moon*.

2. Readings in the Primary Sources. These texts are to be read in advance of each Friday Seminar (see immediately below). They are the most important of all your assigned readings, as they will be examined in the Friday Seminars, which — together with class participation — count for half of your grade in this course.

Friday Seminars

Most Friday classes will be devoted to student-led discussions of particular texts by one or another of the women studied in the course. These primary sources will be distributed in xerocopy to the class at least a week in advance. (None of them is under copyright.) Each Friday seminar will have a student leader, who is responsible for conducting the discussion, and two or three other students who will serve as primary discussants, and who will be particularly responsible for the intellectual quality of the seminar. All other students are secondary discussants, who are expected to contribute to the discussion, though not necessarily as much as the primary discussants. All students are expected to have read the assigned texts for each Friday seminar, but the seminar leader and the primary discussants are expected to have read them with particular care.

Written Assignments

Each assignment is due by 5:00 pm on the specified day. You must hand in two copies of each assignment.

F 1/28 **#1. First Personal Essay.** Write a brief personal essay telling what personal and/or academic interests have led you to take this course, what you hope to get out of it, and what previous exposure (if any) you may have had to magic or magical religion. Please include anything which will shed light on your choice of this course. *This essay will not be graded, and will remain CONFIDENTIAL. Keep this essay on your computer, as you will need to refer to it at the end of the course (see #6 below).*

M 2/14 **#2. Power Paper.** The most obvious ways to acquire personal power rely on straight-forward material advantages, such as physical strength, wealth, number of children and other relatives, or a central geographic or social position. Yet there have been many cases where one individual has acquired significant personal power over others while lacking all such material advantages. Such cases are most striking whenever there is an interpersonal relationship based on extreme and stable differences in the material advantages, for example, in the relationship between a wealthy person and an impoverished one, an adult and a minor, a guardian and a ward, a guard and a convict, a master and a slave, a bully and a victim, a marginal person and one in the mainstream of his or her society, or — in very many societies — a man and a woman. Write a brief essay on the various ways in which the seemingly weaker, marginal or subordinate person in such a relationship may manage to acquire considerable personal power over the seemingly stronger, central or dominant person. *Note: This is not a research paper that requires a bibliography and footnotes, but a general essay requiring wisdom, independent thought and insight into life. Keep this essay on your computer, as you will be asked to re-write it at the end of the course (see #5 below).*

M 3/14 **#3. Prospectus for Research Paper or Creative Project. First,** choose the subject of your major research paper or creative project. Your subject may be (a) any one of the women listed at the end of the syllabus, or (b) any one of the major spiritual (religious, magical or occult) movements treated in the course, or (c) any of the major techniques or practices treated in the course, or (d) any other major theme of the course. ***You must have checked with me in advance for approval of your chosen subject.*** **Second,** write a page or two explaining the reasons for your choice and what you will attempt to show or discover during the course of your

research. **Third,** prepare a tentative bibliography of the primary and secondary literature for your subject. All this is due at the same time.

M 4/25 **#4. Research Paper or Creative Project.** Your research paper is due. It should be as polished as you can make it on your own.

W 5/4 **#5. Revision of Power Paper.** Critically re-read your general essay on power (see #2 above), and revise or rewrite it in light of what you have learned in this course so far.

M 5/9 **#6. Final Personal Essay.** Critically re-read your initial personal essay (see #1 above), and write a second brief essay explaining what you have learned since you wrote that first essay. *This essay, too, will not be graded, and will remain CONFIDENTIAL.*

Grading

Your grade for this course will be based half on your written assignments (#2-#5 only) and half on your participation in class, especially during the Friday Seminars. As a general rule, late papers (even if their lateness is due to a computer crash!) will not be either accepted or graded.

Syllabus of Lectures and Discussions

Asterisks and daggers mark days when written assignments or reading assignments are due, as in the Calendar above.

Week 1: Introductory
W Introduction to the course
F* Survey of the movements and the women to be studied

Week 2: Historical Background; Mesmerism and Magic
M† Historical background
W Mesmerism, 1780+
F The "Orphic Circle," 1830s+

Week 3: Spiritualism, I
M† Spiritualism, 1848+
W Emma Floyd Hardinge Britten, 1823-1899
F ***Seminar:*** Emma Hardinge Britten's *Autobiography* [extracts]

Week 4: Spiritualism, II
M* Spiritualism and women's rights, 1848+
W Cora L. V. Scott Hatch Daniels Tappan Richmond, 1840-1923
F ***Seminar:*** Early trance-lectures by Emma Hardinge & Cora Hatch [examples]

Week 5: Occultism, I
M **[no class]**
W† Paschal Beverly Randolph, 1825-1875
F ***Seminar:*** Paschal Beverly Randolph's writings [extracts]

Week 6: Occultism, II
M H. P. Blavatsky [Elena Petrovna Blavatskaja], 1831-1891
W The Theosophical Society and its offshoots, 1875+
F ***Seminar:*** Early articles by H. P. Blavatsky

Week 7: Occultism, III
M† Annie Wood Besant, 1847-1933
W Anna Bonus Kingsford, 1846-1888, and The Hermetic Society, 1884+
F The Golden Dawn and its offshoots, 1888+

Week 8: Occultism, IV
M* Moina [Mina] Bergson Mathers, 1865-1928 and Florence Farr Emery, 1860-1917
W Dion Fortune [Violet Firth], 1890-1946
F ***Seminar:*** Dion Fortune's novels [extracts]

Week 9: The Metaphysical Movement, I
M† The American Metaphysical Religions, 1875+
W Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy, 1821-1910
F ***Seminar:*** Autobiographical writings by Mary Baker Eddy

Week 10: The Metaphysical Movement, II
M† Malinda Eliot Cramer, 1844-1906
W Emma Curtis Hopkins, 1853-1925
F ***Seminar:*** Autobiographical writings by Malinda Cramer

Week 11: Sex, Social Reform, Spirituality and Magic, I
M The Free Love Movement
W Lois Waisbrooker [Adeline Eliza Nichols], 1826-1909
F ***Seminar:*** Lois Waisbrooker's *The Occult Forces of Sex* [extracts].

Week 12: Sex, Social Reform, Spirituality and Magic, II
M† Victoria Claflin Woodhull Martin, 1838-1927
W Chandos Leigh Hunt Wallace, ca. 1854-19??
F ***Seminar:*** Chandos Leigh Hunt Wallace's *Private Instructions* [extracts]

Week 13: Sex, Social Reform, Spirituality and Magic, III
M* Alice Bunker Stockham, 1833-1912
W Ida C. Craddock, 1857-1902
F ***Seminar:*** Alice Bunker Stockham's *Karezza*.

Week 14: Paganism and Witchcraft
M† Nature Religion, Pantheism and Paganism
W* Witchcraft and Wicca
F ***Seminar:*** *The Book of Shadows* [extracts]

Week 15: Retrospect and Prospects
M* Retrospect & prospects
W **[no class]**

General Bibliography

Unless otherwise indicated, books in this bibliography are in the open stacks of the Rockefeller Library.

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Chronological Lists of the Women and Some of the Men in the Network

The Women in the Network:

Leah Fox Fish Underhill, 1814?-1890, and her sisters (Catherine Fox Jenken, 1833-1892, and Margaret Fox Kane, 1836-1893)
Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy, 1821-1910
Emma Floyd Hardinge Britten, 1823-1899
Matilda Joslyn Gage, 1826-1898
Lois Waisbrooker [Adeline Eliza Nichols], 1826-1909
H. P. Blavatsky [Elena Petrovna Blavatskaja], 1831-1891
Alice Bunker Stockham, 1833-1912
Victoria Claflin Woodhull Martin, 1838-1927
Cora L. V. Scott Hatch Daniels Tappan Richmond, 1840-1923
Malinda Eliot Cramer, 1844-1906
Anna Bonus Kingsford, 1846-1888
Katherine Tingley, 1847-1929
Annie Wood Besant, 1847-1933
Harriet Emilie Cady, 1848-1941
Ella Wheeler Wilcox, 1850-1919
Nellie Craib Beighle, 1851-1916
Emma Curtis Hopkins, 1851-1925
Chandos Leigh Hunt Wallace, ca. 1854-19??
Ida C. Craddock, 1857-1902
Florence Farr Emery, 1860-1917
Moina [Mina] Bergson Mathers, 1865-1928
Edith Maude Gonne MacBride, 1866-1953
Mabel Besant Scott, 1870-1952
Dion Fortune [Violet Firth], 1890-1946

Some of the Men Implicated in the Network:

Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, 1802-1866
Warren Felt Evans, 1817-1889
Paschal Beverly Randolph, 1825-1875
Albert Leighton Rawson, 1828-1907
Henry Steel Olcott, 1832-1907
James Henry Wiggin, 1836-1900
William Wynn Westcott, 1848-1925
William Quan Judge, 1851-1896
Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, 1854-1918
William Walker Atkinson, 1862-1932
Aleister Crowley, 1875-1947
Gerald Brosseau Gardner, 1884-1964